gloomy light. Things on the opposite wall are scarcely touched by it. But to me that feeble burning is a daily miracle. With light the day begins, the mind escapes from darkness, and numbness leaves the body. I sleep in my underclothes, with my pants and shirt and socks heaped upon the table. Needless to say, I dress faster than a fireman. . . .

sleeps in underclothes

humor

Thus the Advance Base day began. The next day, exactly a month after I flew from Little America, I sat down and wrote—at odd moments during the day—exactly what I did from waking to sleeping. The whole entry ran close to 3,500 words. The day happened to be a Sunday, but the flow of the hours at Advance Base was no different from that of any other day. Since the entry describes a typical day, at least for this period, I have decided to include it, except for slight editing against repetition:

Mar 28 – beginning of Advance Base

April 22

. . . After dressing, the first thing I do, of course, and that right lively, is to start the stove. The fuel is usually somewhat congealed, and it takes ten minutes or so for enough to run from the tank to fill the burner. I crave hot tea in the morning; for, rather than wait for the stove to warm up, I heat a quart of water (ice, of course) with meta tablets, which are inch-long wafers of solidified alcohol. I dump half a dozen of these in a can, and set the pan of ice in a metal rack over the hot blue flame.

routine
1. dress
2. stove
3. tea
4. exercise

meta tablets

The silence during these first minutes of the day is always depressing. It seems real, as if a gloomy critic

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KIRSTEN JOHANNSEN

»Freundschaftsinseln«, »Weihnachtsinseln« »Kap der guten Hoffnung« — manche der Ortsnamen, die der frühe Weltreisende Georg Forster in seinen Berichten erwähnt, klingen wohlvertraut. Andere dagegen sind längst in Vergessenheit geraten und könnten ebenso gut erfunden sein. Weil aber jeder von ihnen eine ganze Geschichte zu erzählen scheint, braucht man aus Forsters »Reise um die Welt« eigentlich nur das Inhaltsverzeichnis vorzulesen, um Zuhörende durch Raum und Zeit zu senden. Das Weiße zwischen den Zeilen vermögen sie mithilfe ihrer Imagination selbst auszufüllen.

Dies gilt ebenso für die Betrachtung des französischen Mont Ventoux; auch sie bleibt in Kirsten Johannsens Videoarbeit der Fantasie vorbehalten. Der italienische Dichter Francesco Petrarca bestieg den Berg bekanntlich im 14. Jahrhundert, um mittels ästhetisierendem Fernblick wahre Naturschönheit zu entdecken und diese in einem Brief niederzuschreiben. In Johannsens Video ist dieser Blick allerdings von Nebel verschleiert, aus dem nur gelegentlich spukhaft Gestalten auftauchen. Dass es sich bei diesen quasi-blinden Bergebezwingern um rastlose Fahrradfahrer handelt, kann auch als Hinweis darauf verstanden werden, dass Bewusstsein erweiterndes Reisen wohl nicht zuletzt eine Frage des Anhalten- und damit Festhalten-Könnens ist.

Jenseits aller Vorstellungskraft wäre für die meisten Europäer jedenfalls die Schönheit der Schmetterlinge Surinams geblieben, hätte Maria Sibylla Merian sie im 17. Jahrhundert nicht in betörenden Zeichnungen verewigt. In der Videoarbeit scheinen diese wieder in ihre organischen Originale zurückverwandelt. Tatsächlich sind die Schmetterlinge, die dort mit langen Nadeln festgesteckt werden, aber nach wie vor aus Papier — jenem Medium, das die farbenprächtigsten Erinnerungen ebenso zu konservieren vermag wie die fantastischsten Fiktionen. Inspiriert von historischen Reiseberichten regt Johannsens Videoarbeit so zu Kontemplationen über das Verhältnis von Realem und Imaginärem an und macht deutlich: Die Schönheit der Welt ist nur vermittelt zu haben, und jede Reise ist immer ein Stück weit auch eine geistige.

Karoline Walter

»Friendship Islands«, »Christmas Islands«, »Cape of Good Hope« — some of the place names mentioned by early world explorer Georg Forster in his reports sound quite familiar. By contrast, others have long been forgotten and could just as easily have been invented. But because each of them seems to tell an entire story, we only need to read from the table of contents in Forster's »Journey Around the World« to launch our listeners into space and time. They will be capable of filling the space between the lines with the aid of their imagination.

This is equally true of contemplation of Mont Ventoux, France; also left to the imagination in Kirsten Johannsen's video work. It is known that Italian poet Francesco Petrarca climbed the mountain in the 14th century, in order to discover true natural beauty through an aestheticizing view into the far distance and to write all this down in a letter. In Johannsen's video, however, the view is veiled in mist, from which figures appear only occasionally, like ghosts. The fact that these quasi-blind conquerers of the mountain are unrest-ing cyclists may also be understood as indicating that travel that broadens the mind, ultimately, is probably a question of being able to stop and take hold.

Certainly the beauty of Surinam's butterflies would have stayed beyond imagination for most Europeans if Maria Sibylla Merian had not eternalized them in her captivating drawings during the 17th century. In the video work these seem to have been transformed back into their organic originals. In fact the butterflies, fixed with long pins, are made from paper as before — from the medium that is capable of conserving the brightest coloured memories as well as the most fantastic of fictions. Inspired by historical travel reports, Johannsen's video work thus stimulates us to contemplate relations between the real and the imaginary, making quite clear: the world's beauty is only to be had indirectly, and every journey is also, to some extent, a spiritual one.

Second Hand Journeys: Petrarca, Merian, Forster

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